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SUBJECT: INVESTING IN ITALIAN SUPPORT FOR NATO:

NATO/AFGHANISTAN ITALIAN OPINION-MAKERS TOUR

REF: ROME 3897

1. (U) Summary. On December 8-10, five Italian foreign affairs advisors to government and opposition political parties took part in a highly successful "Opinion-Makers" NATO tour with follow-on to Afghanistan. In addition to educating Italian policymakers about NATO, the tour's purpose was to deepen support for Italy's participation in ISAF and its commitment to Afghan judicial sector reform. The group came away with a highly positive sense of NATO's mission in Afghanistan and Italy's important role in that mission. We believe the tour provided an extremely valuable experience to these up-and-coming policymakers, and should contribute to maintaining strong pro-NATO sentiment among security policy specialists on both sides of the Italian political spectrum in the years ahead. End Summary.

2. (U) For tour participants, Embassy Rome PA and Pol offices selected foreign policy advisors likely to influence Italian political parties, decisions on NATO issues following the April 2006 parliamentary elections. The participants were from both center-right and center-left parties. Rome Embassy Polmiloff along with Rome ODC chief accompanied the tour. Italian participants included:

-- Germano Dottori, Foreign Affairs Advisor, Northern League (led by Umberto Bossi)

-- Beatrice Lorenzin, Chief of Cabinet to Undersecretary Paolo Bonaiuti, Forza Italia (led by Silvio Berlusconi)

-- Alessia Mosca, Foreign Affairs Advisor to former Minister Enrico Letta, Daisy Party (led by Francesco Rutelli)

-- Paolo Quercia, Counselor to Deputy Minister for Productive Activities Adolfo Urso, National Alliance (led by Gianfranco Fini)

-- Angelantonio Rosato, Foreign Affairs Advisor, NOMISMA Research Center (affiliated with center-left leader Romano Prodi).

3. (U) In planning the Afghanistan leg of the trip, Embassy Rome received not only political approval but also extensive programming and logistical support from Italian authorities, including the Prime Minister's office, MFA, and MOD. Embassy Kabul provided essential and much appreciated logistical, security, and program assistance.

4. (U) In Kabul, ISAF Commander LTG Mauro del Vecchio briefed the group on NATO's present and future in Afghanistan. Italian Ambassador Ettore Sequi and Justice Sector Coordinator Ambassador Jolanda Brunetti discussed judicial sector and other civil sector reconstruction efforts. At Embassy Kabul, the group met Ambassador Ronald Neuman and Afghan civil sector reformers. In Herat, Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Commander BG Umberto Rossi guided the group through the Italian PRT and the Italian-supported Forward Support Base. Italian and NATO military air provided transport in and out of Afghanistan, as well as between Kabul and Herat.

5. (U) USNATO coordinated a fine two-day NATO Tour program of briefings at NATO HQ, including by senior US officials, JFC Brunssum, and USEU.

6. (U) Italian tour participants on both the left and right came away from the trip expressing strong enthusiasm for NATO's mission in Afghanistan, and particularly for Italy continuing its important role in ISAF and civil sector reconstruction.

7. (SBU) Comment: With Italian national elections coming up, this experience shows how NATO tours can be used to promote an ally's political commitment to a sensitive overseas military mission. Whether Berlusconi or Prodi prevails in April 2006, the major Italian political parties are likely to seek council from these five tour participants in regard to NATO and especially Afghanistan. We have good reason to expect that all participants, on the left as much as the right, will be well-informed advocates, in public as well as backroom policy debates, for robust Italian participation in ISAF and Afghanistan justice sector reform, as well as for

NATO action beyond Europe. The trip also reinforced the Embassy's links with them. The Ambassador plans to invite them to brief him on their trip in the New Year. End Comment.
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